

3 1761 06893322 5

WHISTLER

THE LANGHAM SERIES  
OF ART MONOGRAPHS

H&SS

A

3785



*Presented to the*  
LIBRARY *of the*  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
*by*

MR. & MRS. C.S. MARTIN





THE LANGHAM SERIES  
AN ILLUSTRATED COLLECTION  
OF ART MONOGRAPHS

EDITED BY SELWYN BRINTON, M.A.

THE LANGHAM SERIES OF  
ART MONOGRAPHS

EDITED BY SELWYN BRINTON, M.A.

VOL. I.—BARTOLOZZI AND HIS PUPILS IN  
ENGLAND. *By* SELWYN BRINTON, M.A.  
With Coloured Frontispiece and sixteen  
full-page Illustrations (xvi + 96)

VOL. II.—COLOUR-PRINTS OF JAPAN. *By*  
EDWARD F. STRANGE, Keeper of Prints  
in the Victoria and Albert Museum.  
With two Coloured and numerous full-  
page Illustrations (xii + 85)

VOL. III.—THE ILLUSTRATORS OF MONT-  
MARTRE. *By* FRANK L. EMANUEL. With  
two Coloured and numerous full-page  
Illustrations (viii + 85)

VOL. IV.—AUGUSTE RODIN. *By* RUDOLF  
DIRCKS. With two Photogravures and  
eleven full-page Illustrations (viii + 72)

VOL. V.—VENICE AS AN ART CITY. *By*  
ALBERT ZACHER. With two Photo-  
gravures and numerous full-page Illus-  
trations (viii + 88)

VOL. VI.—LONDON AS AN ART CITY. *By*  
MRS. STEUART ERSKINE. With one  
Etching and sixteen full-page Illustrations  
(viii + 95)



VOL. VII.—NUREMBERG. *By* H. UHDE-  
BERNAYS. With two Coloured and  
numerous full-page Illustrations  
(viii + 85)

VOL. VIII.—THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY  
IN ENGLISH CARICATURE. *By* SELWYN  
BRINTON, M.A. With two Coloured  
and sixteen full-page Illustrations  
(viii + 96)

VOL. IX.—ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE. *By*  
J. WOOD BROWN, M.A. With numerous  
full-page Illustrations (viii + 88)

VOL. X.—ROME AS AN ART CITY. *By*  
ALBERT ZACHER. With numerous full-  
page Illustrations (viii + 95)

VOL. XI.—JEAN FRANÇOIS MILLET. *By*  
RICHARD MUTHER. With two Photo-  
gravures and nine full-page Illustrations  
(viii + 70)

VOL. XII.—JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER.  
*By* H. W. SINGER. With sixteen full-  
page Illustrations (viii + 83)

*In preparation*

GOYA. *By* RICHARD MUTHER

POMPEII. *By* E. VON MAYER

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

*By* H. W. SINGER

These volumes will be artistically pre-  
sented and profusely illustrated, both with  
colour plates and photogravures, and neatly  
bound in art canvas, 1s. 6d. net ; or in  
leather, 2s. 6d. net.

Vol. VII—Continued. By H. C. ...  
... ..  
... ..  
(1917-18)

Vol. VIII—The ... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..

Vol. IX—The ... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
(1918-19)

Vol. X—The ... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
(1919-20)

Vol. XI—The ... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
(1920-21)


Vol. XII—The ... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
(1921-22)

Vol. XIII—The ... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
(1922-23)

Vol. XIV—The ... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
(1923-24)

Vol. XV—The ... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
... ..  
(1924-25)





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2010 with funding from  
University of Toronto



SELF-PORTRAIT OF JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER

(Etching)

(By kind permission, from the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection)

# JAMES McNEILL WHISTLER

BY

H. W. SINGER

A. SIEGLE

2 LANGHAM PLACE, LONDON, W.

1905



*All rights reserved*

## CONTENTS

The American temperament uncongenial to Art—  
Absence of reverence in the American character—  
As exemplified by Whistler—Disputes with Ruskin,  
Tom Taylor, Oscar Wilde, and others—"The  
Gentle Art of Making Enemies"—The Art of  
Whistler—*Portrait of his Mother*—Described by  
Geoffroy—*Portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell*—De-  
scribed by Theodore Duret—Sketch of Whistler's  
life—Principal paintings—Musical tones and colour  
tones—Their affinities—Whistler as an etcher—The  
Thames Set—The Venice Sets—The Dutch Set—  
Whistler's lithographs—His hostility to critics—His  
theory of criticism—The artist the only competent  
critic—"Propositions"—"Propositions, No. 2"—  
"The Red Rag"—"Ten o'clock"—Whistler's theory  
of Art.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

SELF-PORTRAIT OF JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER (*Etching*) *Frontispiece*

	<i>Facing page</i>
LE COMTE ROBERT DE MONTESQUIOU-FEZENAC ( <i>Lithograph</i> )	8
PORTRAIT OF THOMAS CARLYLE . . . . .	12
STUDY ( <i>Lithograph</i> ) . . . . .	16
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S MOTHER . . . . .	24
THE BEEFSTEAK CLUB . . . . .	28
PORTRAIT STUDY . . . . .	32
STUDY FOR PORTRAIT OF MISS ALEXANDER . . . . .	36
NOCTURNE : ON THE THAMES ( <i>Lithograph</i> ) . . . . .	40
STUDY OF DRAPED FIGURE ( <i>Chalk Drawing</i> ) . . . . .	44
THE FUR JACKET . . . . .	48
PORTRAIT STUDY OF A YOUNG GIRL ( <i>Oil Painting</i> ) . . . . .	52
STREET IN LYME REGIS ( <i>Lithograph</i> ) . . . . .	56
LA PRINCESSE DU PAYS DE LA PORCELAINES . . . . .	64
STUDY OF NUDE FIGURE ( <i>Chalk Drawing</i> ) . . . . .	68
THE BRIDGE ( <i>Lithograph</i> ) . . . . .	72
HUCKSTER'S SHOP ( <i>Lithograph</i> ) . . . . .	80



## JAMES McNEILL WHISTLER

**A**DDRESSING an assembly of artists at Chicago, not long ago, on the question, "May we hope some day to establish a national art in America?" Henry B. Fuller answered his own query with an emphatic "No!" Their origin, their environment, and the peculiarities of the age, he thought, were all against it. The Anglo-Saxon has always been chary of parading his feelings in the public gaze. He does not surrender himself to abstract ideas, but takes his stand upon bare facts, which are death to all art. The individual arrogates to himself too important a *rôle*, and the consciousness of race is proportionately undeveloped. Such conditions, he considered, act with cramping effect upon art, whose backbone is form, manifesting itself in types, not in individuals. Anglo-Saxons are adapted to be rulers and governors of the world, but lack capacity for art. Their very environment is inimical

to it, especially in America, where the climate is opposed to artistic aspirations. The claims of business, too, which fetter the American to the pursuit of money-making, are all against art, and his social ambitions constitute a further obstacle. This is the age of waste-paper, or in other words, the age of widespread intelligence. A hand-to-mouth system of intellectual life prevails, which makes all storage of intellectual ideas impossible. The motto that appeals to most Americans is, "sufficient unto the day is the newspaper thereof." Debarred from the higher walks of art, they aspire to heights of plaster of Paris, and fly to all that is sensational. If they have a national dance, it is that of St. Vitus. They have been nurtured too richly upon inventions and discoveries. This diet has given them indigestion. Art should be without prejudice, but the man of to-day is too self-conscious, too much like a calculating machine. Americans, he said, profess to love Nature, but their claim is ill-founded ; on the contrary, they abuse and stifle her. It is out of all these qualities that their glorious democracy is constructed. It is a melancholy glory ; it is a melancholy democracy. There is not the smallest place in it for art, and there never will be. And he concluded

with the remark that all those considerations did not in the least disturb or vex him. Art was a burden, a cross, an affliction ; the nation from whom she held aloof might deem itself fortunate. Art was an artificial necessity, and should not be fostered. Those who could keep clear of her might rejoice !

In what other country but America could one meet with self-banter of this description ! The Old World is apt to be irritated at American Chauvinism, but only with the object of concealing its own—if possible. No denizen of the Eastern hemisphere compares with the American in wittily and unsparingly laying bare his own weaknesses.

From time to time—now, fortunately, less frequently than in the past—European journals dish up the most fatuous reports or anecdotes concerning every function of human life, which are invariably ear-marked as “Typically American.” The hawkers of such notices, however, invariably demonstrate with unfailing accuracy that they have not the faintest notion of what is “typically American.” There is plenty that is fabulous, silly, incredible, overwhelming, mysterious, and grotesque in other countries than America.

If there is a national peculiarity by which our brothers “on the other side of the herring-pond”—

to borrow their own expression—are distinguished from ourselves, and of which all the behaviour that strikes us as so eccentric is the direct outcome, it is their absence of reverence. The feeling of awe, from any cause whatsoever, is foreign to the American ; his blood never runs cold. It is related that an American in St. Peter's was shown a lamp that was said to have burned without interruption for considerably over a thousand years. What a mighty vista lay opened up by that reflection to impressionable mortals ! This slender flame already flickered here when Charlemagne was crowned in Rome. It was burning when Gregory VII. established celibacy as an insurmountable barrier between the spiritual and the secular world. It was shining when the various races crystallised into political nations, and inaugurated modern history. It flickered throughout that period when, under the Borgias, the temporal power of the Papacy gradually established itself in an apparently unassailable position ; and it still burned on when Pius VII., stripped of every shadow of power, was spirited away at dead of night—a captive of the great Emperor. The hordes of the Constable spared it as they completed their work of devastation, and the bands of Garibaldi, as they so valiantly defended

the Eternal City. This puny tremulous light, its very existence imperilled by every breath of air, had outlasted world-empires by centuries, even though these may have seemed to be as firmly founded on the subjugation of the masses by faith, by individual will-power, as if built on pillars of brass.

And what are our American's sensations in the presence of this lamp? . . . "Pft! Well, it's out now!" *Se non è vero, è ben trovato!*

It is no vain mania for destruction, nor a perverse pleasure in dragging what is lofty in the dust, that prevails here. But where we, the heirs of a thousand years of culture, experience an overwhelming feeling of solemn sanctity, of timid reverence, the American is conscious only of that material humour that can take nothing in deadly earnest, however imposing it may appear from our humble point of view. Instinctively the youthful consciousness of power rebels against recognising greatness in anything, for this were to pre-suppose a limit to its own capabilities. It is simply an absence of reverence.

There is also the childlike pleasure in the jingle of words, in fantastic forms of expression. "Heights of plaster of Paris"—that is typically American. Think of the "head-lines" and titles of American journals—real orgies of rhythm, and

especially of alliteration. To hail an event of the greatest importance in a crisp epigram "that tastes well in the mouth" is their characteristic peculiarity.

I do not know Mr. H. B. Fuller, but imagine him somewhat after the manner of Whistler. In any case, he resembles him intellectually.

Whistler first became known to wider circles by a stroke conceived in the spirit of the American at St. Peter's, by his famous lawsuit with Ruskin. He entered upon it not in order to obtain redress for an insult, nor to protect the trade-mark of his productions. He, too, wished to puff out a light. He, too, remarked that this critic, regarded by all England with awe and wonder, when considered from a freer point of view was particularly petty and ridiculous, and so he "went forth to smite him."

This he did with all the absence of reverence of the typical American. It is impossible for any one who dates his first acquaintance with Ruskin from the perusal of the famous pamphlet "*Whistler v. Ruskin*" ever afterwards to learn to appreciate the celebrated critic. Whistler strings together a series of Ruskin's own utterances that are pearls of absurdity. Even without Whistler's biting, withering, marginal



notes, they would appear sufficient to expose the man to ridicule for all eternity. Whistler alters no word in any quotation that he cites ; everything is set down literally. But he tears whole sentences, if they happen to suit his purpose, out of their context, without indicating the complete train of thought of which they form part. It is not right to turn the reflector of a merciless publicity upon a man's collective blunders, while his collective virtues, which perhaps far outweigh them, are left in the obscurity of silence. That is not quite fair—but it is eminently characteristic of Whistler.

He subsequently concluded the controversy of Whistler *v.* Ruskin in his remarkable book "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies."

The title is misleading. It suggests a philosopher making merry with lofty humour over the weaknesses of his fellow creatures. Nothing of the kind! We have an excited and angry brawler dealing unmeasured blows right and left with the shrewdest of cudgels, often simply obliterating the very semblance of foolish enemies by his corrosive mockery, but just as often getting notoriously the worst of the quarrel—and then he shows in his most unfavourable light. Let us examine his feuds a little more closely.

He disposed of the worthy Ruskin in brilliant style, and it is also delicious to find him recommending one of his favourite victims—" 'Arry " (Henry Quilter)—to employ in future his sense of smell in preference to his eyesight. He is at his best when he is chaffing one "critic," who had declared a water-colour portrait by Herkomer to be that artist's finest effort in oils!—or imploring another who had confused autolithographs with heliogravures from unfinished pen-and-ink drawings, before again taking up the pen, to verify his information by applying to the policemen on duty in the galleries!

But, dipping further into the "Gentle Art of Making Enemies," the reader soon encounters incidents that produce upon him an unpleasant impression. It is not out of pure contentiousness that he magnifies the statement made by his brother-in-law, without malicious intention and as a simple fact, that impressions had been taken from the plates of Whistler's sixteen Thames etchings by an indifferent printer before they came to Goulding, into a matter of primary importance? He convulses therewith the entire press of two hemispheres in an avalanche of letters. He perceives an opportunity of paying out the honest and innocent



LE COMTE ROBERT DE  
MONTESQUIOU-FEZENAC

*(Lithograph)*



Hamerton — who had repeated the story — by calling him, a writer of wide reputation, “a certain Mr. Hamerton.” The chief object of his wrath is, however, his brother-in-law himself, with whom he had already previously plucked a crow in public.

The quarrel arose thus. When Frank Duvenek’s Venetian etchings appeared in London, Haden was for a time under the impression that they must be by Whistler. He took steps to compare them with genuine Whistlers. Chattering busybodies informed Whistler of this. In the form in which the story reached the latter, it had probably been coloured to make it appear that Haden desired to fasten upon his brother-in-law the imputation of smuggling work into the exhibitions under a false name. In any case Whistler, on the strength of this version, forthwith plunged into a fierce newspaper war. At the time, the fact of any one’s calumniating a near relative in such a public manner created a painful sensation ; and even now it is impossible to read the correspondence in the cases we have cited without being unpleasantly surprised that any man could wash his dirty linen in such a manner before the whole world.

That a man should lose his refinement of feeling

is bad enough, but it is still worse when even his sense of honesty becomes blunted.

Whistler quoted a remark of Tom Taylor's on the subject of Velasquez, from which it would appear that Taylor's opinion was pure nonsense. It was, however, demonstrated that Taylor had made this observation not about Velasquez in general, but concerning a particular work of the master's, and that Whistler had torn the expression from its context, thereby materially altering the sense. But what is Whistler's behaviour when Taylor publicly draws his attention to the fact that his quotation is a conscious misrepresentation? With a sovereign arrogance, that rouses the ire even of those who are not personally concerned, he replies: "Why quarrel over your article? In any case you did print the words I quoted, and it is certainly of no consequence what else you may have printed on the subject of the master." Taylor—in every way a dwarf compared with his adversary—was quite right in retorting only that he himself must apologise for having so far forgotten himself as, even for a moment, to take Whistler seriously.

This almost heroic arrogance—which at the first blush is amusing, but which in the end leaves



an unpleasant taste behind it—helped Whistler out of many another slip. Once, desiring to unburden his soul and make sport of the critics, he compared them to the first recusant known to history—Balaam's ass. Thereupon one of his adversaries quickly retorted that by this very comparison he was condemning himself, and had dugged a pit for his own feet. For as a matter of fact it was not Balaam (the prophet and artist Whistler), but the ass (recusant and critic) that recognised the truth, and saw the Angel of the Lord! A distinct checkmate for Whistler; but with an easy conscience he ignores the check, and imagines that he is covering his retreat when he endeavours to divert the reader's attention by a flippant jest. Witty enough, indeed, was the manner in which he took revenge on his architect X., with whom he had come to loggerheads on the subject of his house at Chelsea. Over the door he placed the following inscription: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. *This* house was built by Mr. X."

But his behaviour in the Leyland case was inexcusable. For the decoration of the celebrated "Peacock Room" in this gentleman's house a certain price had been agreed upon in pounds

sterling. When Whistler afterwards suddenly demanded the sum in guineas his patron was naturally indisposed to give way. Whistler, in his exasperation, although he had not a shadow of right on his side, altered one of the painted peacocks in such fashion that Mr. Leyland might daily have before his eyes, in his own room, an obvious caricature of himself. He painted, in addition, a half-length caricature of this Mæcenas which subsequently came into the market.

How Whistler rejoices when he can rend his victim in pieces, when he can as a last resort worry the trivial slip of some quite unassuming, harassed journalist with howls of exultation in the open market-place, and thereby make the unfortunate offender miserably ridiculous! One would imagine that if he himself by any chance blundered he would be ready to expire with shame and confusion. Not a bit of it! When he published a small guide to the exhibition of his Italian work it contained a luxuriant crop of Whistlerian Italian gibberish, such as "Santa Margharita," "San Giovanni Apostolo et Evangelistoe," "Café Orientale," "Piazzetta," and, finally, the celebrated "Campo Sta. Martin." He was naturally twitted with these lapses, and here again he could not stand



*Thos. Carlyle, 1*

PORTRAIT OF THOMAS CARLYLE

*Wm. A. Hall*



up honestly to his opponents, but wriggled out of it with a grimace—a stupid jest.

Wedmore had a similar experience with him. Whistler quoted from an article of Wedmore's, "I have no wish to understand Whistler's works"—a very narrow-minded statement if he had really made it. Wedmore, however, had said nothing of the sort, but had actually written, "I have no wish to understate Whistler's works," and he naturally took the first opportunity of setting himself right with the public. After this any gentleman might be expected to apologise for the false quotation, if only to avert the suspicion of the oversight having been other than unintentional. To his breach of the truth, however, Whistler added a breach of good manners by answering rudely: "Yes, the misprint is indeed inexcusable, since not only I, but even the compositor, might have known that with Mr. Wedmore and his like it is always a question of *understating*, and never of *understanding*, anything."

Such behaviour implies a coarseness of feeling which renders impossible any further intercourse, even of a hostile character, and to it Wedmore made no reply. Oscar Wilde was not so prudent; possibly relying on the possession of a not less keen,

and considerably more refined wit than Whistler himself, he several times allowed himself to be drawn into a war of words. These skirmishes took the form of letter and reply addressed to the editor of some popular newspaper. Whistler soon drops as usual into his "Arizona Kicker" style. Oscar Wilde then retires, and at the same time in conclusion cleverly puts his enemy to the rout. Referring to the proverb "Charity begins at home," and apostrophising "Atlas," the pen-name of the editor of the *World*, he says, "Atlas ! this is very sad. With our James vulgarity begins at home ; would that it might stop there !"

Whistler never forgave Wilde this inkstained victory. Both now and later he pursued him with spiteful accusations of plagiarism. The Wilde-Whistler episode concluded with a letter by the latter in which he attacks a personal weakness of his adversary in a manner that can only be described as vulgar. It is a psychological marvel that a man accustomed to move in cultured society could descend, without the faintest compunction, to the lowest depths of vituperative expression. But the marvel was renewed in the last great public controversy wantonly provoked by Whistler, on the subject of his lawsuit against Sir William Eden. After



he had lost his case—on the first hearing entirely, and at the second in all its essential points—he relieved his mind of the mountain that oppressed it by the publication of a sort of epilogue to the “Gentle Art,” a pamphlet entitled “Eden *versus* Whistler.”

From the very beginning he endeavoured, as a relative of Sir William has quite correctly stated, “to travesty a perfectly simple situation out of all knowledge beneath a veil of vituperation.” The situation was this. The price of a portrait-sketch which Whistler agreed to make for Eden had been fixed beforehand at from £100 to £150. The baronet was so devoid of tact as to hand Whistler an envelope containing the smaller sum, although the portrait had, as a matter of fact, grown from a mere sketch into a finished picture. Now those very people who are themselves most wanting in tact are notoriously the first to detect its absence in others. An artist who was equal to the situation would, with lofty irony, have given the niggardly baronet to understand that it was the artist’s place to determine whether the picture should be paid for at the higher or the lower limit of the stipulated price. But such satisfaction is far from sufficient for Whistler. He insists on dragging the whole

affair into the full glare of publicity ; and calls the whole world to witness the shabby behaviour of Eden ! Had he only restrained the exuberance of his vituperation, he would not have so seriously damaged his own cause. But he lost his case, and consoled himself by means of the pamphlet before-mentioned, to which he appended an epilogue, wherein, foaming at the mouth like the Thersites he was, he bespattered with filth the enemy at whose hands he had suffered defeat before the world's tribunal. To me it remains an enigma that this epilogue was not followed by an action for libel.

Even the unassuming personality of the present author has had to suffer from the artist's ungracious moods. Having occasion to travel to England, I had been commissioned to discover whether Whistler's services could be enlisted for a certain undertaking. Knowing that he was extremely difficult of approach, I armed myself with two unexceptionable introductions, and repaired to No. 8 Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy Square. There I found a long passage, giving access to a number of studios. The stillness of death reigned around, while I sought out the right door, and knocked at it several times. It was not opened to me, but on



STUDY  
(Lithograph)



the farther side of the closed portal there arose a cheerful whistle—I was not only to return home with my mission unfulfilled, I was also to know that I was intentionally left to stand without !

I had also received no answer to several letters and telegrams previously despatched. But I was by no means alone in my experience. Strang related to me that he once happened to visit Whistler when he was painting the portrait of a lady of high rank. On Whistler's appointing the following day for a further sitting, this lady complained of having to come again so soon, and of the sacrifice she had to make, both of time and convenience, as long as the sittings continued. "But, my dear lady," retorted Whistler, half with pathos, half in sarcasm, "that is nothing in comparison with the sacrifices that I have to make on your account. Just look ; since I have been painting your portrait, I have not once had time to attend to my correspondence." And, in point of fact, Strang found a mountain of letters upon the table, not a single one of which had been opened.

It is, after all, no art to make enemies by such behaviour—and least of all a "gentle" art.

In fact, Whistler in time lost all his earlier friends one by one. The estrangement of Oscar

Wilde, in many respects a kindred spirit, was followed by that of George Moore, whom he could not sufficiently praise when he took up the cudgels on Whistler's behalf, but whom he made the object of the most unworthy suspicions when, during the Eden episode, he maintained a neutral position. He quarrelled with the poet Swinburne, whose dignity was somewhat damaged in the course of the controversy, and had to witness the secession of Stott of Oldham, on whom Whistler once bestowed the high praise that to overlook his work in an exhibition was nothing less than a disgrace. Last of all, even his oldest friend, Kennedy the picture dealer, who in the course of years had put up with much from him, and who had done him nothing but kindness, is said to have been compelled to break with him.

Apart from his wit, his social brilliance, by which he always at a first introduction made a most fascinating impression, he must have proved on nearer acquaintance a singularly unsympathetic creature.

I have gradually led my readers up to this conclusion, not because I take any pleasure in dwelling on a man's unpleasant traits, or in reviving discreditable episodes, but because I believe that a

knowledge of these facts is necessary to the comprehension of Whistler as an artist.

Natural science teaches us that there can be neither diminution nor increase in the total sum of units composing this Cosmos. Bodies become fluid, fluids become gases ; atoms undergo changes, but they become neither more nor less numerous.

It is possible that somewhat analogous conditions exist in the human race. The collective powers possessed by each of us amount perhaps on the average to one and the same total. We who are all much alike, who possess that proportion of good and bad qualities which causes them to balance one another, are the agreeable average members of society—charming in our intercourse with our fellow creatures, utterly without influence on the progress of humanity. But those in whose natures ugly chasms yawn, in whom one form of energy is disproportionately developed, at the expense of another which is entirely absent, become—either criminals or geniuses !

Perhaps Whistler's human soul was occupied by a double portion of pettiness, invidiousness, and malice, so that his artistic spirit might be entirely free and unfettered in its greatness. What negative forces there were in his organisation were



concentrated in his human relations; his artistic existence was without a flaw.

In an age that witnessed the most sudden divergences in the current of artistic tendencies—in which each group of artists carried on a bitter feud against its predecessor, and attack became all the more general, because it was not personalities but principles that formed the bone of contention, and because it was not only creative artists but also their public that joined in the fray—Whistler brought to perfection that art of his which is throned high above all strife, and which no longer even challenges discussion. For even the celebrated *Nocturne* that excited Ruskin to such a churlish outburst of criticism aroused his indignation, not by the question of its artistic merits, but of its commercial value. He was only incensed that any one should demand £200 for a small picture which bore not the faintest trace of the sweat of “honest labour.” Even here it was no sensational conception of art, but a sensational conception of its market value that Whistler proclaimed to the world. His art knew nothing of the sensations of the day, of Oriental or of so-called naturalistic religious painting, of Impressionism or of the art of humble life, of *plein air* or

of the numerous other noisy creeds of the past forty years that have turned the heads of thousands and tens of thousands. It bloomed in an atmosphere of calm refinement which was calculated to repel the interest of the masses. Had Whistler, the Man, been of a reserved disposition, his art alone would never have brought his name to every one's lips. It would have appealed to a few great intellects, men like-minded to himself, and these certainly might have moved the crowd to awe and reverence, but never to affectionate comprehension. For the art of Whistler reaches its highest manifestation in works such as those which Geoffroy and Duret have so finely described. Note the former's analysis of Whistler's *Portrait of his Mother*.

"The woman is seated in a severely simple chamber where the dying twilight yet lingers. She is seen in profile, at rest, motionless and plunged in thought, in one of those reveries that wear such an outward semblance of calm, and yet are doubtless profoundly stirred beneath the surface by the emotions of a lifetime.

"There is much that is sombre, much that is black, about this gentle lady and her surroundings. The flowered curtain, the chair, the picture-frame upon the wall, another frame of which only a

portion of the border shows, the skirting of the wall, the shoes upon the feet placed close together on the foot-stool, the flowing robe—all these are black with the blackness of mourning, the blackness of sable hangings, the blackness of funeral cards. But life still beats strongly in its setting of sadness—the life of a warm heart and a serene and placid spirit. The delicate hands even, veiled by the ruffles at the wrists and resting in the lap upon a lace handkerchief, the slender features, refined and pensive, bent upon the ground, while the eyes are raised towards visions invisible to the earthly sight, yet none the less vivid to the dreamer; these hands and these features are the most softly real, and the texture of the flesh the silkiest and warmest ever recorded on canvas by an artist inspired by tender respect for an old age that has preserved the grace of youth—that delicate aroma of former beauty.

“For that grace, that beauty, that youth are still present. They lurk everywhere, in the curve of the sunken mouth, in the depth of the gaze, in the rose that blooms on those delicate cheeks. It is this rose—rather than the silvery red light which fills the room—it is this rose that lights up these walls, these hangings, these garments, wherein

shadow is heaped on shadow. 'Ever since painters have existed,' wrote d'Aurevilly with exquisite fancy, 'is it not on a black palette that they mix their tenderest rose?' And again: 'Love, youth, the first intoxication of life are all so glorious; when they have vanished, their purple radiance lingers within us, until the blackness of night closes over our heads. . . .'

"Such is the admirable idea of this painting, instinct with an art of simplicity, of harmony, of grand lines, comparable only with the art of the greatest masters, and charged with a significance that is quite individual, quite fresh. An admirable and harmonious achievement, an earnest and profound portrait, in the half-shadows of which the genius from the North stands revealed with incomparable pride and infinite sweetness! The portrait of Maternity—such as only the son born of this woman, and developed into a great artist, could conceive it—it is a surpassing poem to the glory of Womanhood. To take a creature of youth and beauty, in the bud or bloom of her charm, and to transfer her to canvas for all the world to admire is perhaps too obvious. Whistler proved that it was as easy for him to take her when the flexible and supple figure had begun to fall into

attitudes of weariness, when the hair was touched with silver, and the delicate pink of the cheeks—still charming—fulfilled but the melancholy task of disguising physical decay and adorning the shrine of ancient memories.” \*

\* “La femme est assise dans une chambre sévère où traîne la clarté dernière des crépuscules. Elle est tournée de profil, au repos, immobile et songeuse, dans une de ces stations qui paraissent si calmes et qui doivent être si intérieurement agitées par toute l'existence qui a été vecue.”

“Il y a bien du sombre, il y a bien du noir sur cette douce femme et autour d'elle. Le rideau à fleurettes, la chaise, le cadre fixé au mur, un autre cadre dont on voit un peu la bordure, la plinte, la chaussure des deux pieds rassemblés sur un tabouret, l'ample robe, tout cela est noir, d'un noir de deuil, d'un noir de tentures funèbres, d'un noir de lettres de faire-part. Mais la vie est réfugiée dans ce décor de tristesse, la vie d'un cœur chaleureux et d'une pensée sereine. Les deux mains mêmes perdues dans les manchettes, et appuyées au creux des genoux sur un mouchoir de dentelle, le visage amaigri, fin, pensif, abaissé vers le sol alors que les yeux se lèvent vers les visions invisibles et certaines, ces mains et ce visage sont de la réalité la plus douce, de la chair la plus soyeuse et la plus tiède que jamais artiste ait évoquée avec un respect attendri devant la vieillesse qui



*Paul, Luxembourg*

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S MOTHER

*Ph. G. Murell*





And again : “ Out of the many pictures there, one portrait attracts and rivets our attention. The

a gardé de la jeunesse la grâce—ce souvenir exquis de la beauté.

“ Cette grâce, cette beauté, cette jeunesse, sont présentes. Elles sont partout errantes, et elles se fixent à la sinuosité de la bouche rentrée, au profond du regard, à la fleur rose qui fleurit encore sur ces joues amaigries. C’est ce rose, plus encore que cette lumière d’argent et de vermeil qui remplit la chambre, c’est ce rose qui éclaire ces murailles, ces tentures, ces vêtements, où se sont accumulées tant de ténèbres. ‘ Depuis qu’il existe des peintres,’ écrivait exquisement d’Aurevilly, ‘ n’est ce pas toujours sur une palette noire que se broie le rose le plus doux ? ’ Et il disait aussi : ‘ L’amour, la jeunesse, les premières ivresses de la vie, tout cela est si beau quand tout cela n’est plus, tout cela s’empourpre tant en nous quand le noir de la nuit nous tombe sur la tête. . . . ’

“ C’est l’admirable signification de cette toile où rayonne un art de simplicité, d’harmonie, de grandes lignes, comparables seulement à l’art des plus grands artistes, et d’une signification si individuelle, si nouvelle. Œuvre admirable, harmonieuse, image grave et profonde où le génie du Nord resplendit dans la pénombre avec une fierté incomparable et une douceur infinie ! En même temps que le portrait de la Maternité, tel que pouvait le concevoir le fils né de cette femme et devenu

subject is a woman—tall, elegant, and slender. She seems to be moving away from the spectator into the background of the picture. She appears in profile, just as she turns her head to cast a last glance behind her before disappearing. It is Lady Archibald Campbell, one of the most beautiful women in England. This portrait presents her sparkling with life, in all her charm, with her supple waist, her fair hair, silky and rebellious, her delicate features, and the humid depths of her eyes. The artist has conveyed to the features an expression of light disdain very appropriate to the subject ; for nothing can be more becoming to any one so beautiful as this than a certain pity for the host of hideous

un grand artiste, c'est un poème extraordinaire à la gloire de la femme. Il est peut-être trop indiqué de prendre un créature de jeunesse et de beauté, en croissance ou en épanouissement, et de la donner à admirer sur la toile où elle a été transportée. Whistler a montré qu'il était aussi facile pour lui de la prendre, alors que sa taille, flexible et souple, tombe aux attitudes lasses, que ses cheveux s'argentent, et que ce rose délicieux des joues reste délicieux et devient si mélancolique quand il vient parer l'usure du corps et le refuge des pensées de la vieillesse."—G. GEFFROY : "La vie artistique," 1<sup>re</sup> Série (Paris 1892), pp. 80-83.

visitors who come to contemplate her, or for the unfortunate people, equally plain, and badly painted into the bargain, whose portraits hang on the surrounding walls.

“The technique, the brush-work, the colouring of this picture are absolutely original, and dominate all the works around. The draperies stand out in grey against a black background ; the grey and black combine to form an harmonious whole. The technique is broad, the brush-work attains by boldness of handling to the most extreme simplicity, the picture is full of atmosphere, and the background of distance. One feels that the model lives and moves. Unless my notions on the art of painting are erroneous, it seems to me that this picture fulfills all the conditions essential to a work of the highest art. Originality in form and substance, invention in the subject, simplicity in the execution—these are, surely, the characteristic signs of a masterpiece. And, in fact, this portrait is from the brush of Whistler.”\*

\* “ . . . Là, entre toutes les toiles, un portrait nous sollicite et nous retient. Le modèle est une femme de grande taille, légère et élancée ; elle marche comme pour s'éloigner du spectateur et s'enfermer dans la tableau ; on la voit de profil, au moment où elle

But it is not by art of this description that the masses are moved.

retourne la tête pour jéter un regard avant de disparaître. C'est lady Archibald Campbell, une des femmes les plus belles de l'Angleterre. Le portrait nous la donne vivante, dans toute son charme, avec sa taille souple, ses cheveux blonds, soyeux et voltigeants, ses traits vaporeux, ses yeux humides et profonds. Sur le visage, l'artiste a mis l'expression d'un léger dédain fort approprié au sujet ; car à qui est aussi si belle que cela, rien ne sied mieux qu'une certaine pitié pour tant de visiteurs si laids qui viennent vous contempler, où pour les pauvres gens, également laids et mal peints, dont les portraits sont accrochés, dans le voisinage, à la muraille. La facture, la touche, le coloris de ce tableau sont absolument originaux et tranchent sur tout l'entourage. Le costume se détache en gris sur un fond noir ; le gris du costume et le noir du fond se combinent et forment un ensemble harmonieux ; le faire est large, la touche arrive par grands plans à la plus extrême simplicité ; le tableau est plein d'air, et le fond se recule. On sent le modèle vivre, marcher, s'agiter. Si mes notions sur l'art de la peinture ne sont point erronées, il me semble que voilà réalisées toutes les conditions d'un œuvre de grand art. Originalité de forme et de fond, invention dans le sujet, simplicité dans l'exécution ; la vie, le mouvement rendus sensible sur la toile ; ce sont bien là les traits caractéristiques d'un œuvre de maître. Et, en effet, ce



### THE BEEFSTEAK CLUB

*(By kind permission of Mrs. Walter Dowdeswell)*



Geniuses, it is said, are born geniuses. As far as artistic perfection is concerned, Goethe never surpassed his "Werther." But Whistler appears to form the exception that proves the rule. He decidedly attained by gradual growth to his greatness. Yet in his case it is not so much a process of development and refinement that we trace, in obedience to an impulse from within ; rather do we see him gradually throw off the restraints imposed upon him from without. From the outset his goal had been more or less clear to him ; but it was by degrees that he learned to free himself from the pretensions of those around him who were fast bound by conventional rules of art.

It is remarkable how few facts in the life of this artist of world-wide reputation have become public property—a striking proof, be it remarked, that in accusing him of ordinary vanity his adversaries grossly calumniated him. Neither is the present author in a position to offer his readers much that is definite on the subject, nor even to vouch for the literal accuracy of the little he is able to record.

The Whistler family can be traced back to at portrait est de M. Whistler.—TH. DURET : *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 1884, vol. 29, pp. 535-536.



least the time of the communicative Pepys, who frequently alludes, in his invaluable Diary, to an ancestor of our artist, the physician Whistler. Of this individual's descendants, one branch was settled during a considerable period in Ireland, and thence migrated to the Southern States of the Union. Without doubt tho sojourn among two such excitable, pugnacious, and passionate races awakened in the earlier generations of Whistlers some of those characteristic qualities which we find so fully inherited by their latest scion.

Whistler himself saw the light for the first time among the somewhat frostily pious, coldly righteous Yankees at Lowell, Massachusetts, on July 11, 1834.

His father was a soldier and an engineer. He is said to have enjoyed the personal favour of the Tsar Nicholas I., and to have been summoned at his suggestion to assist in the construction of the St. Petersburg-Moscow Railway. Thither his wife followed him with their child James. Shortly afterwards, however, the father died, and the widow and orphan returned home. In 1851 James entered West Point Military Academy, where his father, too, had been educated. He appears then to have been called simply James Whistler, and to

have added the name of McNeill at a later period entirely on his own authority—no unusual practice in England, and still less so in the United States, where one generation frequently alters the family name of the preceding one in the most arbitrary fashion.

Whistler remained four years at West Point before abandoning a military career. As a lieutenant he visited the West coast of South America ; I accept the journey as belonging to this period. Mr. Justice Day has at Kensington an oil-painting by him, representing an effect of light in the harbour of Valparaiso, which is certainly based on sketches from Nature, and not on mere recollection. For, long before Whistler quitted West Point without a graduation certificate, he had turned more and more away from mathematics and military science in the direction of drawing and painting.

On one occasion Whistler received official orders to engrave a map—apparently a kind of bird's-eye view ; for the authorities came to loggerheads with the youthful artist on account of his conception of the trees and other scenic details introduced by him. Tradition has fixed upon Baltimore, during the period following his sojourn at West Point, as the scene of this episode, and attributes to it the

important function of having caused Whistler's final renunciation of State employment of every description.

On leaving West Point, Whistler betook himself to Paris, and studied for two years under Gleyre. His earliest associates were Bracquemond, Degas, and Fantin-Latour. In 1859, 1860, and 1863 he figured among the rejected of the Salon—on the latter occasion in the company of Manet, Cazin, Degas and Bracquemond. Whistler had sent in his *White Girl*, which in the same year excited great attention at the Salon des Refusés. It is with this exhibition that his artistic career really begins.

From that time forth he gravitated between London and Paris, accordingly as he was impelled by the caprices of his temper, and occasionally by the attentions of his admirers. In each place he had fitted up for himself an ideal home. In Paris it was situated at 110 Rue du Bac—a house with a garden, which he was able to retain until the last; and at Chelsea, in Tite Street. He was destined in later years to see the "White House," which he built here and himself decorated, pass into the possession of a despised adversary. That in the course of these many years he twice journeyed to Venice,



*Amsterdam*

PORTRAIT STUDY



and that he frequently visited the North of France and the Netherlands, is shown by his works. Of any further events in this man's domestic life practically nothing has reached the public.

Even of artists of so little notoriety as Böcklin, or of those who have passed an existence of studied retirement, like Thoma, the newspapers were occasionally able to supply us with personal news ; but it is in the highest degree remarkable that this was never the case with Whistler, unless it were in immediate connection with the completion of one of his pictures. The false report of his death in Holland, published about two years before his actual decease, forms almost the only exception to this rule. This, as we have already urged, affords a striking proof of how little he possessed of that vanity which loves to display the personal relations of its possessor to the gaze of the world. It was only when he had to fight for his own artistic beliefs—which naturally included a high appreciation of his own life-work—that he claimed the attention of the public.

After *The White Girl*, Whistler exhibited, at the Salon of 1865, the *Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine*, and, in 1867, *At the Piano* (heliogravure in the *Art Journal*, 1900). To this period also belongs *The*

*Music Room.* After a considerable interval, the artist, who in the meantime had developed into the "real Whistler," exhibited in Paris in 1882 a masculine portrait; in 1883, for the first time, the *Portrait of his Mother*;\* in 1884, *Miss Alexander* and *Thomas Carlyle*; followed in 1885 by *Lady Archibald Campbell*; and in 1886 by *Sarasate*. Other celebrated portraits are those of *Théodore Duret*, *Lady Meux*, *The Master Smith of Lyme Regis*, *Little Rose of Lyme Regis*, *Sir Henry Irving as Philip II.*, *Miss Rosa Carder*, *Harry Menn*, *M. de Montesquiou*, *Mrs. Huth*, and his own portrait.

In 1883 he held for the first time a small private exhibition of his "Nocturnes," "Symphonies," and "Harmonies" in Paris, in the Rue Sèze.

In London he first exhibited as long ago as 1859, at the Royal Academy—two etchings after Nature; and his first oil-painting, in 1860, at the same place. He exhibited his Venetian etchings here on several occasions between 1888 and 1883, and pastels in the year 1881. But the first exhibitions organised by him entirely according to his own ideas, and for the purpose of displaying his colour "harmonies" and "symphonies," took place in

\* EDITOR'S NOTE.—This fine painting had already appeared (1872) at London in the Royal Academy.



London at the same time as in Paris, in 1884 and 1886, at 133 New Bond Street.

In 1884 he was elected President of the Royal Society of British Artists, but soon quarrelled with the old-fashioned element among its members, and the whole affair degenerated into one of those disputes upon which such copious light has been shed in "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies." It is not until towards the close of his life, in 1898, that we find him again at the head of an artistic corporation, when the "International Society" was proud to acknowledge his leadership.

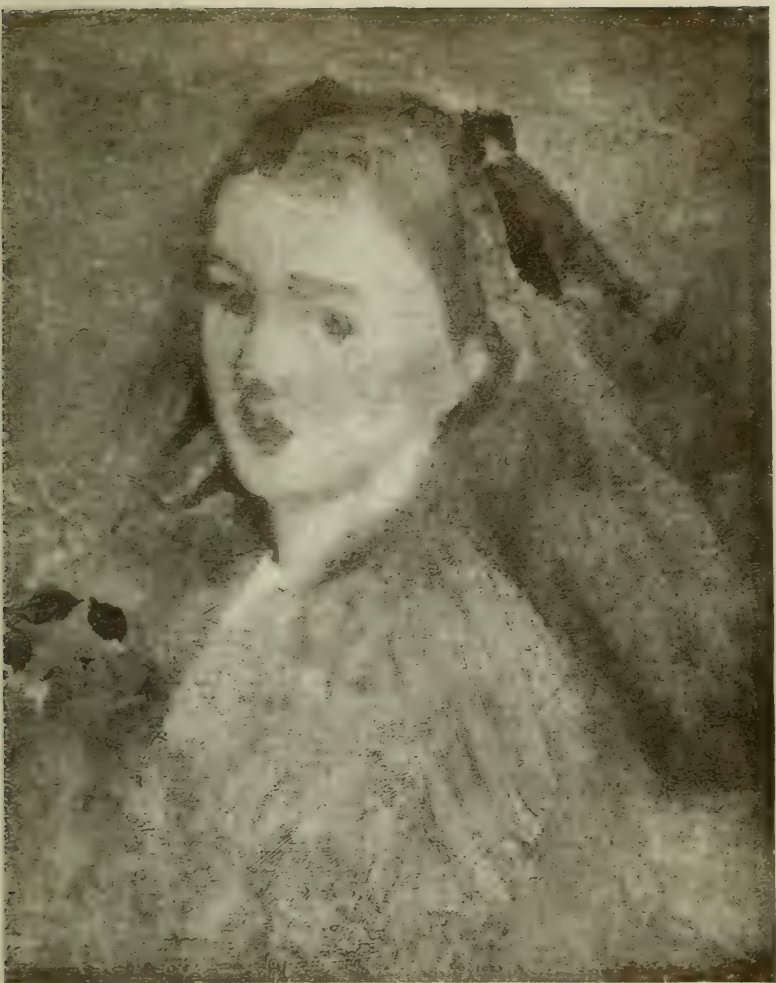
An opportunity was afforded to artistic Germany, also, of seeing and pronouncing on Whistler's portraits and "Harmonies," at the great International Exhibition at Munich in 1888. But the recollection is by no means a pleasant one. The jury officiating on that occasion established a peculiar claim to the affectionate recollection of posterity by awarding a Second Class medal to the *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, now in the Luxembourg !

Of Whistler's "Harmonies" in colour, there are a very large number in existence, offering indeed the richest variety of subject, but frankly shedding little or no light on principles. Many of the finest are night scenes. The titles of some few, such as :

*Nocturne : Cremorne, Fireworks ; Nocturne : Blue and Silver, Battersea Reach ; Green and Violet : The Evening Walk, Dieppe ; Brown and Gold : The Curé's Little Class ; Grey and Gold : Honfleur ; Nocturne : Blue and Gold, Valparaiso, &c.*, afforded certain external data for identification, but the majority received merely such names as "Arrangement in Yellow and White," or "Harmony in Brown and Gold."

To the year 1877 belongs one of Whistler's most important purely decorative achievements, the "Peacock Room" in Mr. Leyland's house, Prince's Gate, London, intended as an effective setting for the *Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine*. The colours and form of the peacock were worked up on a gold ground into a decorative scheme that is marvellous in its effectiveness. The decoration of his house in Tite Street was carried out entirely after his own designs, even to the painting of the exterior. In Paris he decorated the Music Room of his friend Sarasate's house, and designed the furniture for it.

In conclusion, a few more of his figure studies should be noted, such as the *Japanese Girls on the Terrace*, *The Artist's Studio*, &c., and then we shall have recapitulated the titles of at least those more important works of the master which are known to the



STUDY FOR PORTRAIT OF MISS ALEXANDER

*(By kind permission of Mr. Alexander Burr)*



world owing to their having been publicly exhibited. Messrs. Goupil issued a portfolio in 1898, containing reproductions of twenty-four of his best pictures.

Harmony in colour had ever been Whistler's fundamental principle in art, even though he did not at first attain to the refinement that marks his prime. *The White Girl* stood out in white against a white background—showing, as early as 1863, a variety of shades of white. And the two succeeding important pictures, *At the Piano* and *The Music Room*, likewise already suggest a symphony in black and white—an accord to which the master would later on have conceded merely the value of an assonance.

In the first of these pictures a dreamy woman, clothed in black, is seated at the piano, from which she seems to be eliciting a mournful melody, while a little girl, all in white, standing in the curve of the instrument, listens with earnest attention. The second picture shows the same mother in a black riding-habit, her left hand raised towards a flowered curtain, glove and whip in her right, while the little white girl is seated behind her in a corner, reading. The detail of the small white figure *behind* the black one will appeal to the close

observer as a master stroke, while the picture displays a second device of a similar artistic nature ; the third figure, that of an elderly woman (possibly the painter's mother) seated in a somewhat stooping position, does not appear in the plane of the picture itself, but is visible in the mirror over the chimney-piece.

Any one desiring to convey some idea of these pictures to a person who had never seen them, would very probably compare them with the work of Alfred Stevens. The personal temperament of the two artists, and their respective technical aptitudes, developed along different lines, naturally distinguish the works of each from those of the other. In spite of this, in their earlier periods they are remarkably alike.

But Whistler gradually outstripped his contemporary.

His excursions into the divine art of the Japanese endowed his eye with greater sensitiveness to colour. His profound study of Velasquez developed his understanding for the more subdued, lower-pitched tones of his palette, and finally his innermost being became absorbed in a spiritual existence almost, as it were, musical in its character. In henceforth employing musical designations for his art he was

influenced by no external considerations. Others than he have spoken and still speak of the "key" in which a work of art is pitched. In Whistler's case this was more than a mere conceit.

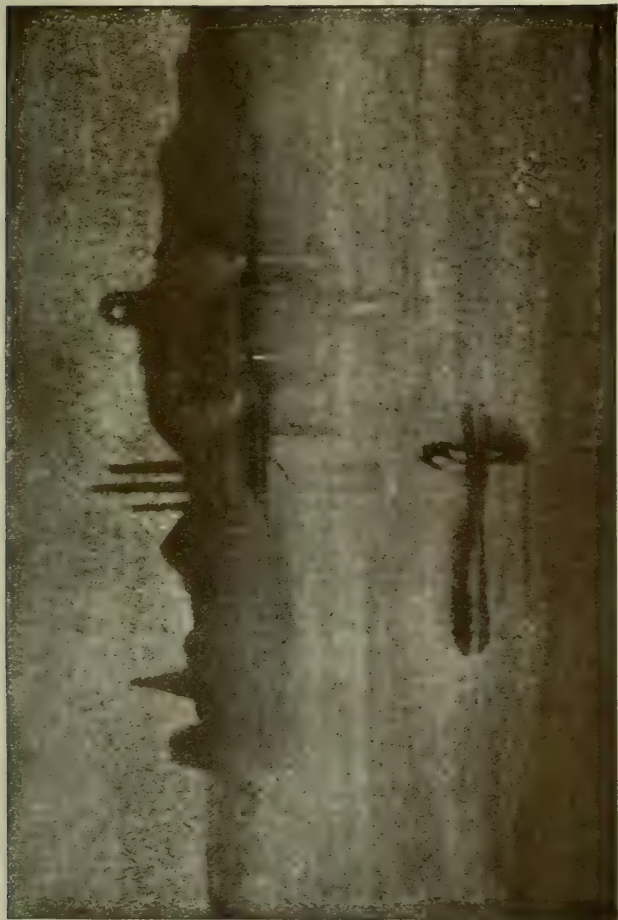
Nearly all true musicians possess not only what we call an absolute musical ear—that is to say, they can at once recognise any note that strikes their ear, or the key in which any sound has been produced—but to them every key, indeed frequently even a single note, possesses a definite spiritual character.

To Whistler, in like manner, colours were endowed with distinct definite characters, and he wove them into harmonies and symphonies, in precisely the same manner that a musician combines the tones of the musical scale. But Whistler's public did not at first grasp this idea. Their notion of a harmony in colour was based on their acquaintance with such work as that, for instance, of Feuerbach; they quite misunderstood the art of Whistler. If he calls a picture a "Harmony in Black and Grey" it is not to be understood that all other colours are either excluded, or modulated into the two that are specified. Black together with grey are the principal colours of his picture, just as in the Allegretto of the Seventh Symphony



A Flat is the dominant key, but without, of course, excluding in the course of the composition others that are related to it. But as the greatest composers preserve with the most refined sensibility and rigid severity the purity of their sense of tonality, and even in the course of the most extensive modulations never weaken the impression of the character which the dominant key gives, and ought to give, to a composition, so Whistler selected only such subsidiary colours as would not disturb the harmony of his black and grey.

Even among masterpieces there are differences of rank, and *Tristan* stands exalted high above *Tannhäuser*. All of Whistler's colour-symphonies were not equally successful. Indeed, their success is exactly proportionate to the degree in which he was able to adapt and subordinate the subject of his picture to its colour-scheme. In Whistler's creations, as in all art, the subject-matter was only of importance in so far as it proved more or less conducive to the realisation of the artist's intention, and not in the slightest degree on account of its own intrinsic and active qualities. It is true that the *Nocturne: Fireworks at Cremorne* cannot for a moment be compared with the *Arrangement in Black and Grey: Portrait of my Mother*, but care



NOCTURNE: ON THE THAMES  
(*Lithograph*)



should be taken not to draw false conclusions from that fact. Many critics have endeavoured, on the strength of this picture, to attribute to Whistler exceptional nobility of character ! What has he himself to say on the subject ? "Take, for instance, the picture of my mother, exhibited at the Royal Academy as an 'Arrangement in Grey and Black.' Now that is precisely what it is. To me it is interesting as a picture of my mother ; but what can or ought the public to care about the identity of the portrait ?" How can or ought the public to concern itself with the relation between artist and subject ? In this particular case the model lent itself in a marvellous manner to the realisation of the scheme of the picture. It is to that, and not to the circumstance that the artist happened to be painting the portrait of his own mother, that we owe this superb work.

It is owing to the purely artistic character of these creations that there is so little to be said about them. Once the critic has established an understanding with his reader as to the true conception of their prevailing scheme, the functions of language are exhausted ; it is upon the eye and the intellect of the observer that further appreciation depends. Explanations of the subjects are, thank Heaven !

unnecessary ; patriotic or moral observations are fortunately equally uncalled for ; nor does even the question of technique require elucidation.

It is precisely because these works belong to the purest form of art that they so frequently fail to appeal to that great majority which is unendowed with perseverance to acquire a sound artistic taste.

Whistler's etchings, although they too at first formed the subject of animated controversy, obtained a far earlier meed of public recognition than his oil-paintings ; at the same time, it is even more evident in the case of the former than of the latter that the master's art was by no means all born with him.

The superficial observer will be apt to imagine that Whistler's early etchings are those most eagerly coveted. As far as there is any truth in this impression, it is not on account of their remarkable beauty, but of their unusual rarity that they are thus highly valued. Of his later etchings he printed a certain fixed number of impressions and then destroyed the plates ; of the earlier plates, after extremely limited editions had been pulled from them, several passed into other hands and were used in the production of a supplementary series of impressions. The extreme care that is

necessary on the part of the collector to avoid having these modern reprints foisted on him has lent a kind of sporting charm to the pursuit of genuine originals, which accounts for his remarkable eagerness in this direction. Such impressions are doubtless the most popular, but solely on account of their rarity.

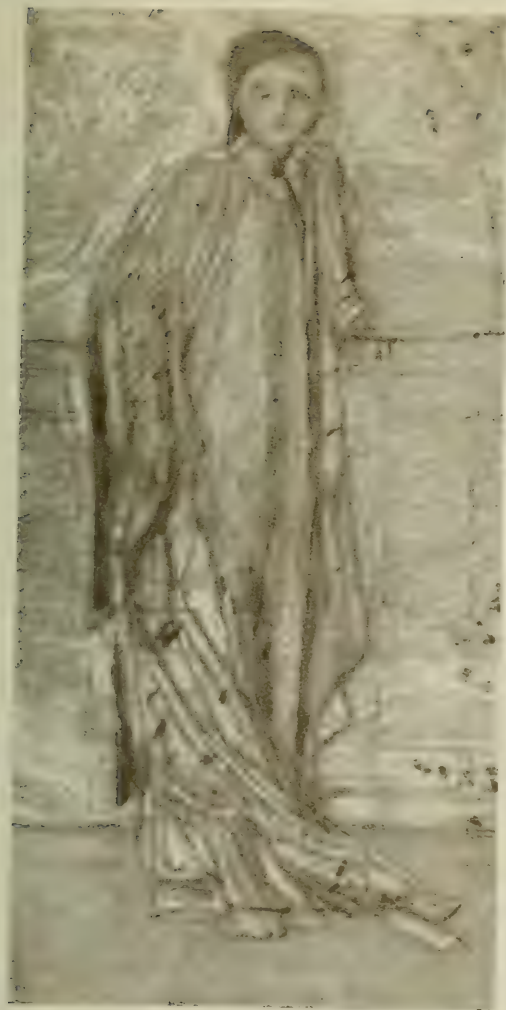
There are, too, of course, a limited number of persons who "from conviction" prefer these youthful essays to Whistler's later etchings. They belong to that reactionary class to which Whistler's fresh, virile, and truly original art is an abomination, and which lends its best assistance to his detractors by extolling the sins of his youth at the expense of his great life-work.

And in truth many of Whistler's earliest etchings can only be excused on the ground of youth, and those who make their acquaintance only after seeing the master's Venetian and Dutch studies will certainly be disappointed. Old Nagler would have said of them that they were "cleverly etched." This was his invariable phrase, when no other commendation would occur to him. Generally, if the remark had any meaning at all, it denoted a study in which the artist's uncertain needle had drawn an abnormal proportion of purposeless lines !

Nothing surprises the observer more than to see the master who was destined later on to expand to a stupendous extent the power of expression contained in a few easily numbered strokes (as none of his predecessors, not even Rembrandt van Rhyn had been able to do)—to see, I say, this same master descending in his early days to the verbose line-language beloved of the reproducers of pictures, or even to the uninspired zig-zags of the amateur, whose mind has never known an original idea !

I can find nothing pleasing in Whistler's early etchings. It is in the "Thames Set" that we first begin to take him in earnest, although his great genius did not reveal itself until even long after that. *Black Lion Wharf*, *The Pool*, *Billingsgate*, *Adam and Eve*, *Old Chelsea*, &c., are fine etchings, but not beyond the capacity of many other artists. They display a comprehension of the peculiar qualities of the art of etching far in advance of that evinced by Whistler's earliest works. He pays attention to the decorative distribution of the black and white ; he begins to exercise, at least with regard to the sky, the greatest economy in the employment of his medium. The manner in which he approaches the question of light, without in the slightest degree descending to the laboured and





STUDY OF DRAPED FIGURE

*(Chalk's Drawing)*

*(By kind permission of Mrs. Knorr)*



meretricious effects so frequently employed in etching, reminds us of the peculiar charm of Bernardo Bellotto. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the fact that even these studies by no means excel the standard already attained by many other artists.

But with the appearance of the first Venetian etchings all has changed as though by magic ! An acute connoisseur remarked with justice, after seeing these studies, that he knew no other artist who looked so little behind him and so far ahead. And here I may again, on the authority of Helmholtz, who called Darwin a genius "because he opened up to Science essentially fresh points of view, and guided Research into new paths," bestow the same title on Whistler, since he opened up to *Æsthetics* essentially fresh points of view, and guided Art into new paths.

The newness of the art in question consists in its enhanced capacity for expression ; Whistler himself aptly defined it as the art of omission.

He developed it almost exclusively in street scenes and landscapes. But here, too, as ever, the subject-matter was of entirely secondary importance ; hence the disappointment of those who approach his Venetian etchings with hearts full of

romantic yearnings, and find in them no moonshine, no Romeo and Juliet, and nothing of the ancient glory of the Doges. The artist will not even meet them to the extent of presenting the details of his subjects in their proper order, and consequently these dilettanti find themselves all at sea in "their Venice that they know so well." They can only see that all is incorrect—that the Campanile is on the left when it should be on the right, and that the Grand Canal lies where the Giardini Pubblici ought to be. Whistler etched these studies directly from Nature on the plate; hence, like all other engraved work, when printed they appeared reversed and left-handed. It would have been quite possible for Whistler, without any great difficulty, to etch his study on the plate in reverse order, as would be done in the case of any other block, but he apparently omitted of set purpose to do so. For he was not producing illustrations or a book of travels, in which, after all, fidelity to Nature might be exacted, but works of art. Possibly he may have actually for once so far forgotten himself as to be desirous of instructing, and by rendering beforehand any tame comparison with Nature out of the question, to draw the observer's attention away from the material object in the direction of

the work of art. In Whistler's etchings the natural object represents not so much the model as a point of support for the composition, thus fulfilling a somewhat similar function to that performed by the key of a musical work.

Considering the extreme refinement of Whistler's artistic sensibilities, it goes without saying that immediately on attacking a fresh medium he commenced to form a style of his own by developing the resources of that medium according to its own natural laws.

It might be taken as a matter of course that artists should paint, or carve, or etch, according to the facilities afforded by brush and oil-colours, chisel and stone, or needle respectively—yet it is only a small minority that does so. Some attempt subjects in water-colour that are only adapted for oils, or work in marble in a fashion only suited to bronze—to name but two of such offences against good taste. The fault is invariably owing to their first setting a goal before their mind's eye, and steering straight for it, regardless of all other considerations; instead of first of all asking themselves whether their object is to be attained without forcing the medium employed—instead, too, of making that object depend on the choice of a medium.

The art of etching was always, in this respect, the most sinned against, not only because unfortunately so many painters approached it from hackneyed points of view, and with a stereotyped feeling for style, but also because professional etching devoted itself so entirely to the reproduction of pictures, and thus aimed at displaying, not the charms of its own art, but those of painting. Its strength was frittered away in a paltry, elaborate, but expressionless technique, which sought its salvation in forced and colourless chiaroscuro.

Whistler was of course not the first or only artist, but he was one of the greatest, to break through all these conventions. For him the white of the paper has an equal value with the black of the line, and it is not until he has isolated the latter, and given it individuality by means of a contrasting space of white, that he is able to invest it with significance. In fact his work never contains a stroke, however infinitesimal in length, that does not possess a value of its own. Having carried his art to this pitch of perfection, he is able to observe a hitherto unprecedented economy in the employment of his medium, and to confine himself to a matchless art of the softest but most pregnant significance.

Take such etchings as *The Little Mast*, *The*



*Photo, Mansel*

# THE FUR JACKET

*(In the Collection of William Burrell, Esq.)*





*Piazzetta, The Riva, San Giorgio, The Balcony, &c.* In each the strokes are almost to be counted, and yet how they assist the eye to complete the picture for itself! One of the most wonderful studies in this respect is *Zaandam*, in which single hair-lines less than half an inch in length suggest an expanse of country, stretching for miles, with greater force of conviction than colour photography, should it become an accomplished fact, will ever be able to do.

Absolutely astounding is the mastery with which Whistler transposes the individual forms of Nature into his harmony of line. Observe, for instance, a window in such a study as *The Balcony*, or the lamp-post in *The Barber's*. We know that, as a matter of fact, the window-frame is as straight as a candle, and that the lamp-post is as perpendicular as the string of a plummet. Any one would imagine that it would be impossible to avoid expressing these things by means of straight lines. But mark how Whistler does it—and then compare his work with that of people who have no resource in such cases but to employ straight lines.

Compare it, too, with the work of other and excellent artists, and mark how Whistler in most cases excels them in unbounded mastery of his medium.

Numberless other artists, too, have discovered that there is no such thing in art as a straight line, and have sought ways and means of circumventing this "lie of Nature," and of softening the rigidity of Form. None of them discovered such a happy solution as Whistler. By means of close inspection with the glass, it is often possible to see how he softens his forms, not, for instance, by making his line less firm, but by resolving it into two parallel lines running close together, and finally joining.

Whistler by no mean exhausts the possibilities of etching. Within the limits of the logical development of the medium there are other means than those adopted by him, of intensifying to the highest possible pitch the expression value of the single line. He will have nothing to do with the art of covering which made the work of a Callot, of a Méryon, so admirable. At the same time, to what astonishing perfection he brings that branch of etching to which he devotes himself! how, for instance, he suggests not only form, but also movement!

Of Whistler's etchings, 375 in all are recorded; this total is inclusive of his early works. Most of the Venetian studies are superb, and are already extremely rare. It is still more seldom that we encounter those enchanting and marvellous pro-

ductions of a yet later period, whose themes were taken from Northern France, Holland, and especially Belgium. When by a mere chance any of these find their way into the market, they are eagerly secured for many times their weight in gold ; comprising, as they do, the very finest examples of Whistler's work, and some of the most perfect specimens of the art in existence. I refer in particular to such studies as *The Smithy ; Palace, Brussels ; Square House ; Balcony, Amsterdam ; Pierrot ; Nocturne : Dance House ; Zaandam ; The Embroidered Curtain ; The Mill*, and other later etchings from Bourges, Brussels, Tours, Loches, Paris, &c.

I will only briefly touch on Whistler's lithographs. Of these there are about a hundred and fifty, of which the majority are sketchy little figure-studies, hurriedly dashed off, with here and there a street scene or a portrait. Once more we see Whistler, as a matter of course, working in closest sympathy with his medium, and aiming at effects that could only be produced by means of lithography. Since the granulated line of lithography is softer and less continuous than that of etching, he strives in the former still more than in the latter to suggest motion in a manner that is delicately elusive. The lithographs afford even fewer

instances than the etchings of that faithful copying from Nature, which alone is comprehensible to commonplace intelligences.

It must be evident to every one that Whistler was hardly likely to gain universal approval by his attitude towards those whom he termed "critics." With Whistler "critic" was a term of reproach, applied to all writers upon art, but more particularly when their opinions were unfavourable to himself. It is, possibly, by reason of its inexplicable inconsistency that this rancour against the writer upon art, which in Whistler's case arose from a morbid vanity, is so widespread among creative artists.

Since our civilisation has become so enormously complicated, and facilities of intellectual intercourse have increased to such a fabulous extent, art is more than ever "caviare to the general."

While the possession of wide knowledge and experience has become more and more the essential condition of an acquaintance with art, she recedes ever further from the immediate grasp of the layman. When the good people of Nuremberg who were Dürer's contemporaries had rejoiced in his works and those of his school during an entire generation, and had had little opportunity of seeing any other, it was of course easy for them to assimilate



PORTRAIT STUDY OF A YOUNG GIRL

*(Oil Painting)*

*(By kind permission of Messrs. Dore & Co.)*





late the idea of an art that had its roots in the very soil which was the theatre of their own thoughts and actions. But how is the public of to-day, which has very little leisure to spare into the bargain, to come into touch with Art, when she presents herself at one moment in the form of Impressionism, and the next in that of Symbolism ; when to-day that public is called upon to wonder at Meunier, to-morrow at Klinger, the day after that at Segantini, then the "Glasgow Boys," and Heaven knows what else, in one giddy kaleidoscopic whirl. For this purpose a middleman or mentor is necessary ; and this office is filled by the art critic. His conception of his mission almost always is to introduce an artist to the public ; he must be exceedingly naïve if he addresses himself to the artists themselves,—and he will not do it a second time ! Art critics are nearly always enthusiastic apostles, whose ambition is to acquire popularity for their heroes. If an occasional indictment of styles that are foreign to their own taste escapes them, that is no great misfortune ; the art critic remains, in spite of all, the artist's one friend. Those who, like Whistler, pursue him with studied malevolence, are only cutting their own throats, and it is by no means surprising that Oscar Wilde was, before long, in a

position to write of Whistler himself: "Popularity is the only insult that has not yet been offered to him."

Whistler, after he had gained his suit against Ruskin, with a farthing damages, vented his spleen, as we have remarked above, in a pamphlet. He discussed therein the *raison d'être* of critics. He opposes to their cry of "Il faut vivre" a frankly energetic "Je n'en vois pas la nécessité." In this opinion he is not alone; those who mix freely with artists frequently encounter similar declarations. The ears of those whose privilege it is to earn their bread in artistic circles are often enough greeted by a mocking "Where would you writers on art be without us? You are only satellites in our train, and quite dependent on us."

This sounds plausible enough, but, strictly speaking, the exact opposite is the truth—especially at a time like the present, which knows nothing, except by tradition, of any direct influence exerted by an artist on the public.

The pace at which the world moves nowadays would deny even the genius of Michelangelo, if unaided, its due meed of recognition. The proofs of my assertion—that the world mainly realises its art by means of the intervention of the art critic—

are legion ; were I to enumerate them, they would fill a volume. I have only space for two—one negative and one positive.

Anselm Feuerbach found no follower, no apostle, no art critic to proclaim to the world in accents of conviction his glorious creations, and so this noble master sank, misunderstood and embittered, into the grave. On the other hand, that the German nation possesses its Hans Thoma is entirely due to the generous enthusiasm of the art writer, or "critic," as Whistler would have called him, Henry Thode. The merit is his, and his alone, that the gloom, which for more than forty years shrouded the life and the work of this artist, was at last dissipated.

However fine the creations of the painter may be, without the assistance of his friend the "critic," outside appreciation, at least, will be denied him.

Whistler not only heaped obloquy upon this friend, but did it in singularly unintelligent fashion into the bargain.

To a question put by the defendant's counsel in the celebrated case of *Whistler v. Ruskin*, Whistler replied :

"It is not only when criticism is hostile that I

object to it, but also when it is incompetent. I hold that none but an artist can be a competent critic." On the same occasion he also committed himself to the statement that it is not until a man has practised during a life-time the art he essays to criticise that his opinion can be of any value!

What extraordinary nonsense! Nonsense, too, that is none the less plausible since the illustrious Dürer fell into the same error three hundred years ago. Such an argument is almost equivalent to maintaining that none but a hardened criminal is qualified to sit in judgment on his fellows, since no one who has not passed his life in swindling, robbery, and murder can with justice mete out punishment for such offences. Or, with still greater reason, that confidence should be placed only in a physician who had himself suffered from all the maladies for which he prescribes, since he alone is qualified by his life's experience to cure us! The cream of the joke, however, lies in the fact that the two "critics" whom Whistler especially had in his mind, who were the most obnoxious to him, and whom he mercilessly endeavoured to expose—that these very two "critics," Ruskin and Quilter, had been painters from their youth up! And that, too, not only as amateurs, but having



STREET IN LYME REGIS

*(Lithograph)*



both exhibited and sold pictures ! Were it necessary to demonstrate the absurdity of Whistler's assumption, this proof alone would do so with brilliant effect.

This is one of the few cases in which Whistler's powers of discrimination failed him. Any child can understand that to paint pictures and to pass judgment upon them when painted are two very different things. However many fine pictures an artist may have painted, he is not in the slightest degree qualified thereby to pronounce judgment on æsthetic questions ; at the most he may be able to do so on matters of pure technique. The idea in Whistler's mind, when he gave utterance to this foolish sentiment, was of course that only a man who has devoted his life to the investigation of art is qualified to pronounce an opinion upon it. Expressed in this manner, the sentiment will be subscribed by all persons of intelligence. At the same time, the less the critic himself has painted or carved, the better it will be for him ; on the same principle that the physician who has himself suffered least from sickness will be best able to assist others.

After all, we can attach but little importance to the negative influence of Whistler. He, it is true,



hugged the delusion that his efforts had had a "purifying" effect ; but his polemics, his crusades against criticism, never produced the slightest good result, never redressed the most trifling evil. All the more highly must we esteem the master's positive influence. It emanated, of course, in the highest degree from his glorious creations ; but partly, too, from his expressed thoughts. How enormously the theory of subdued colours and low tones in painting has caught on—in Paris, in Scotland, in America, and even in Germany ! The entire movement dates from Whistler.

His etchings, too, and his lithographs have inspired not only imitators but, what is much more essential, other artists like-minded with himself. Think how difficult it is in these days to establish any sort of influence, since there is always the risk that even when an impression has been made it may, in the turn of a hand, be effaced by a counter impression. Taking into account, too, how infinitesimally small was the number of Whistler's personal pupils who were in a position to actively disseminate his views, and considering the widespread extent of the revolution he inaugurated, we are compelled from this point of view, also, to accord the highest appreciation to the artist's power.

This power, in my opinion, must be attributed to his remarkable artistic insight. Coldly calculating critics can account for much by dint of industry, which in the last resort is merely a somewhat refined trial of patience; for instance, they can discover by analysis the elements of beauty in any object. In contrast to this, the warm-blooded creative artist endows the world with beautiful objects, not by deliberate calculation, but without exactly knowing how and why—giving expression, so to speak, to his own unconscious feelings. But the man who possesses not only force of genius to create original works of art, but also penetrating intelligence to grasp the essential laws of their production, stands high above these two extremes.

Such a genius was Whistler. His delicate discrimination and what is commonly called sense of beauty, in short, the sensitiveness of his spiritual perceptions, enabled him to produce marvellous works. At the same time he was always able to account for his creations. He was one of the few artists who have reflected deeply on the essential nature of art—who did not create their masterpieces as it were unconsciously, but rather built upon a foundation of profound science. In this sense he combined Power and Knowledge. There-

fore what he has written upon art is worth studying, save always in the few cases in which his rage against the critics has obscured his vision.

It is true that many artists have ventured on the compilation of theoretical treatises, but with the exception of a mere handful the prudent maxim, "Let the artist create, not talk," may fairly be applied to them. Of this handful Whistler was destined to be the most eminent. Most of what he has written on art is to be found in his book, "The Gentle Art."

Among his most striking maxims are the excellent "Propositions" addressed to the Hoboken Etching Club, on the occasion of Whistler's receiving an invitation to take part in a competition in which every plate sent in was to measure at least two feet by three. He wrote as follows :

"I. That in Art it is criminal to go beyond the means used in its exercise.

"II. That the space to be covered should always be in proper relation to the means used for covering it.

"III. That in etching, the means used, or instrument employed, being the finest possible point, the space to be covered should be small in proportion.

"IV. That all attempts to overstep the limits insisted upon by such proportion are inartistic thoroughly, and tend to reveal the paucity of the means used, instead of concealing the same, as required by Art in its refinement.

"V. That the huge plate, therefore, is an offence—its undertaking an unbecoming display of determination and ignorance—its accomplishment a triumph of unthinking earnestness and uncontrolled energy—both endowments of the 'duffer.'

"VI. That the custom of 'Remarque' emanates from the amateur, and reflects his foolish facility beyond the border of his picture, thus testifying to his unscientific sense of its dignity.

"VII. That it is odious.

"VIII. That, indeed, there should be no margin on the proof to receive such 'Remarque.'

"IX. That the habit of margin, again, dates from the outsider, and continues with the collector in his unreasoning connoisseurship—taking curious pleasure in the quantity of paper.

"X. That the picture ending where the frame begins, and in the case of the etching, the white mount, being inevitably, because of its colour, the frame, the picture thus extends itself irrelevantly through the margin to the mount.

"XI. That wit of this kind would leave six inches of raw canvas between the painting and its gold frame, to delight the purchaser with the quality of the cloth." \*

As soon as Whistler becomes historical, he comes to grief, for neither does the custom of "Remarque" emanate from the amateur, nor did that of margin originate with any one but artists themselves, even though it were from the less gifted ones. But from an æsthetic and theoretical point of view, how unerringly he decides what is right, and traces it to its origin! It was artistic feeling that induced Rembrandt to etch nothing but small plates, but probably he would have been quite unable to explain that feeling.

All the oldest engravings, down to the time of Dürer, and in some branches of the art even centuries later, have no margin between the edge of plate and the picture. Indeed we may conclude with certainty, on the evidence of existing prints, that the refined feeling of both Dürer and Rembrandt caused them to carry their engraved surface right up to the edge of the plate, or to leave at the outside only the merest fraction of margin. Any one encountering impressions from these old masters,

\* "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies," pp. 76, 77.

with full margins, may be quite sure that they are of recent date, or that at least they did not reach the market direct from the hand of their authors. But here again, in the case of the old masters, feeling is the determining factor—not science, as with Whistler. Dürer essayed the compilation of pages upon pages of æsthetic notes, but they do not contain the clear expression of even one solitary guiding principle of that good taste which he undoubtedly possessed.

Whistler's second series of "Propositions" deal with that question of "complete finish" which was brought so prominently into the foreground in his action against Ruskin. All laymen consider thoroughness in execution an indispensable qualification of the master, and the fact that the celebrated *Nocturne* had been dashed off apparently at lightning speed was quite sufficient proof to the majority of its inferior value. So that when Whistler confessed that he had bestowed, at most, two days on the picture, the opposing counsel asked, in tones almost of indignation: "It is, in fact, for the labour of two days, then, that you ask two hundred guineas!"

"No; I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime."

By this answer he implied, in the most brilliant



fashion, that he too duly appreciated earnest labour and efficient industry—but never as a goal in themselves.

But to Whistler the unkindest cut of all must have been when Burne-Jones, in a spirit hostile to Whistler's work, declared in the witness-box : " In my opinion . . . a picture ought not to fall short of what has been for ages considered as complete finish." To this Whistler retorted effectively : " A picture is completely finished when nothing more can be done to improve it." And it was against Burne-Jones' declaration, which was unworthy of him, especially under the circumstances, that " Propositions, No. 2 " were directed. These were as follows :

" A picture is finished when all trace of the means used to bring about the end has disappeared.

" To say of a picture, as is often said in its praise, that it shows great and earnest labour, is to say that it is incomplete and unfit for view.

" Industry in Art is a necessity—not a virtue—and any evidence of the same, in the production, is a blemish, not a quality ; a proof, not of achievement, but of absolutely insufficient work, for work alone will efface the footsteps of work.





*Photo. Mamey.*

LA PRINCESSE DU PAYS DE LA PORCELAINE



"The work of the master reeks not of the sweat of the brow—suggests no effort and is finished from the beginning.

"The completed task of perseverance only has never been begun, and will remain unfinished to eternity—a monument of goodwill and foolishness.

"There is one that laboureth, and taketh pains, and maketh haste, and is so much more behind."

"The masterpiece should appear as the flower to the painter—perfect in its bud as in its bloom—with no reason to explain its presence—no mission to fulfil—a joy to the artist, a delusion to the philanthropist—a puzzle to the botanist—an accident of sentiment and alliteration to the literary man."\*

These sentences, too, have become part of the gospel of the newer art criticism.

The letter that Whistler wrote to the *World* on May 22, 1878, under the heading "The Red Rag," is particularly important. The "red rag"—in the eyes of the British public, to wit—is his use of such designations as "symphony," "harmony," "arrangement," and "nocturne" for the purpose of

\* "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies," pp. 115, 116.

indicating the character of his paintings. For this he was reproached with "eccentricity." His friends would have liked him to call the "Harmony in Grey and Gold," in the background of which an insignificant little black figure is plodding through the snow, "Trotty Veck," in allusion to Dickens' well-known Christmas tale.

With a clearness that no artist before him had approached, Whistler demonstrated that all such appeals to other arts—all illustrating in oils, every epigram and every anecdote in colour—are but miserable imitations. The painter who falls back on such expedients must be conscious that his work possesses no charm of its own, and is therefore driven to emulate that belonging to another art. But any one possessing proper respect for creative art will appreciate a painting simply as a painting, without reference to the particular circumstance which it happens to depict ; he will appreciate it on its merits as a composition attuned to a certain colour, in the same way that a musical symphony is composed in a particular key.

"Art should be independent of all clap-trap—should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love,

patriotism, and the like. All these have no kind of concern with it. . . .

“The imitator is a poor kind of creature. If the man who paints only the tree, or flower, or other surface he sees before him were an artist, the king of artists would be the photographer. It is for the artist to do something beyond this: in portrait painting to put on canvas something more than the face the model wears for that one day; to paint the man, in short, as well as his features; in arrangement of colours to treat a flower as his key, not as his model.” \*

In these words are embodied the truth, even though it be not expressed with overmuch sharpness of definition, that Art is nothing more or less than Nature seen through the spiritual eye of an individual—a union of objective material with subjective power.

Whistler's last “Propositions,” which first appeared in the *Art Journal* in 1887, are by far the most important of all, inasmuch as they serve most distinctly to elucidate his own conception of the art of painting. They have reference to that criticism of his pictures which reproached his preference for

“The Gentle Art of Making Enemies,” pp. 127, 128.

low and subdued tones. In this case he does not actually concern himself with this reproach, for to him of course it was none, but he traces the fundamental reasons for its being so continually levelled at him, and thereby throws light upon a defect in the art of painting which many of his colleagues have often enough felt to be inconsistent, without being able to explain it. The painter's greatest enemy, as well as his greatest friend, is his medium—his instrument. It assists one artist to bring to perfection an admirable style, while it leads another astray amidst the pitfalls of an ignoble facility. By means of colour the artist is enabled to elaborate his model and render it more plastic than it appears in Nature, and the unintelligent painting of several generations found pleasure in these tricks, until at last the figures of a picture actually "stood out" from the frame, whereas they should really "stand within the frame—and at a depth behind it equal to the distance at which the painter sees his model." In addition to this, so much painting is done in studios, where the model itself is in a glaring light to which it would never be subjected in ordinary life. This practice finally led to a glassy brightness of colouring, especially in the flesh tones, which by no means corresponds to that of Nature.



STUDY OF NUDE FIGURE

*(Chalk Drawing)*

*(By kind permission of Mrs. Knowles)*





And Whistler further draws attention to the remarkable fact that the public has entirely ceased to recognise this actual fault as such, for the reason that it has accustomed itself to compare Nature with Nature, but pictures always and exclusively with pictures. People had expressly acquired the habit of seeing things artificially, and therefore whenever an artist appeared who, like Whistler, really approached nearer to Nature, his pictures were pronounced to be inaccurate.

The experience of many others has confirmed Whistler's observation. When artists of the *plein-air* school gave a lilac tone to the shadows that lay on the sand in a study of the dunes, every one protested ; so firmly had the whole of humanity persuaded itself that the shadows in an oil-painting must be grey. It was only when observers gradually arrived at comparing the pictures with Nature herself that they were compelled to admit the correctness of the new theory of colouring.

From the passages quoted it is evident that this fine artist also filled an important *rôle* as a prophet of æsthetics ; that not only as a divinely inspired oracle did he proclaim the gospel of beauty, but that he also kept faithful guard over the truth which he discerned, and thus presents an example of the

highest development of human greatness—the conscious creator.

It is therefore well worth the trouble of following him, too, when he sums up his views on art in general. This he accomplished in his well-known lecture, which he christened with sly humour, “Ten o’clock,” from the evening hour at which it was delivered. He gave it for the first time on February 20, 1885, in London, before a select audience ; subsequently on March 24 at Cambridge, and on April 30 at Oxford.

The lecture is distinguished by its quaint and affected diction. Alliteration is one of its main resources ; the sentences are detached, and couched in a strain of rhapsody, the veil of the indefinite is cast over the whole, with intent to convey a subtle charm. Reading this discourse, one longs for the personality of the lecturer, upon which such pearls of speech were strung. But beneath his not un-studied tricks is concealed, contrary to expectation, a most excellent wisdom. These few pages, received in a right spirit, might go far to atone for the mischief done to the British public by the folios of Ruskin.

It was by no means solely with the idea of un-burdening his mind that Whistler felt himself

prompted to this lecture ; he desired also to take up a definite position. At that time Oscar Wilde was turning British heads with his religion of "Æstheticism"—a compound of Botticelli, sunflowers, and knee-breeches. This was the movement that Gilbert and Sullivan parodied so delightfully in their *Patience*.

As an exordium, Whistler delivers a philippic against the reformers who proposed to confer happiness on the masses by means of Art, after the manner of Oscar Wilde, by educating æsthetic communities whose very heart-strings would be wrung by a particular shade of rose, and from whom a certain tone of lilac might draw tears. These communities did not, of course, attain by an intelligent antiquarian study of beauty to a perception of the truth ; they considered that every relation of human life might be adapted to a worship of the Quattrocento.

Are we not once more passing through similar phases ? Are there not, even at the present time, leather-lunged prophets who solemnly proclaim that everything must be leavened by Art ; for Art it is that ennobles a people, and therefore let us use our best endeavours to bring Art into the home of every peasant—every working man !

“Alas ! ladies and gentlemen,” says Whistler, “Art has been maligned. She has naught in common with such practices. She is a goddess of dainty thought—reticent of habit, abjuring all obtrusiveness, purposing in no way to better others.

“She is, withal, selfishly occupied with her own perfection only—having no desire to teach—seeking and finding the beautiful in all conditions and in all times, as did her high priest, Rembrandt, when he saw picturesque grandeur and noble dignity in the Jews’ quarter of Amsterdam, and lamented not that its inhabitants were not Greeks.

“As did Tintoret and Paul Veronese, among the Venetians, while not halting to change the brocaded silks for the classic draperies of Athens.

“As did, at the Court of Philip, Velasquez, whose *Infantas*, clad in inæsthetic hoops, are, as works of art, of the same quality as the Elgin Marbles.

“No reformers were these great men—no improvers of the ways of others ! Their productions alone were their occupation, and, filled with the poetry of their science, they required not to alter their surroundings . . . . In all this, their world was completely severed from that of their fellow



THE BRIDGE  
(Lithograph)





creatures with whom sentiment is mistaken for poetry ; and for whom there is no perfect work that shall not be explained by the benefit conferred upon themselves.

“ Humanity takes the place of Art, and God’s creations are excused by their usefulness. Beauty is confounded with virtue, and, before a work of art, it is asked : ‘ What good shall it do ? ’ ”

“ Hence it is that nobility of action, in this life, is hopelessly linked with the merit of the work that portrays it ; and thus the people have acquired the habit of looking, as who should say, not *at* a picture, but *through* it, at some human fact that shall, or shall not, from a social point of view, better their mental or moral state. So we have come to hear of the painting that elevates, and of the duty of the painter—of the picture that is full of thought, and of the panel that merely decorates.”

. . . . .

“ Art happens—no hovel is safe from it, no Prince may depend upon it, the vastest intelligence cannot bring it about, and puny efforts to make it universal end in quaint comedy and coarse farce.

“ This is as it should be—and all attempts to

make it otherwise are due to the eloquence of the ignorant, the zeal of the conceited.

“The boundary-line is clear. Far from me to propose to bridge it over—that the pestered people be pushed across. No ! I would save them from further fatigue. I would come to their relief, and would lift from their shoulders this incubus of Art.

“Why, after centuries of freedom from it, and indifference to it, should it now be thrust upon them by the blind—until wearied and puzzled they know no longer how they shall eat or drink—how they shall sit or stand—or wherewithal they shall clothe themselves—without afflicting Art.”

There follows next a further outburst against the followers of Oscar Wilde.

The movement inaugurated by the latter spent itself in an affected style of dress, and of necessity aroused the antipathy of every honest man. An artificial enthusiasm for art is just as futile as its enforced exercise. The truth is that it is not the business of the apostle and teacher to compel, persuade or drive his following to the love of art ; the utmost he should do is to lure them on. For the conditions, however, to be absolutely healthy, the people must come of their own accord ; they

should require only an interpreter, not a missionary. No feeling for art can be genuine unless it springs from the spontaneous impulse of the people. Whether artistic education, as it is now again practised afresh, though on quite other principles than those employed by Oscar Wilde, yields any adequate result, is at least doubtful. It is the same with art as with religion : where faith is wanting preaching is of no avail.

From all these varied points of view Whistler's utterances afford us infinite gratification ; they brilliantly confute the innumerable follies of the false prophets, whom all their labours, prolonged though they were, did not advance one step in the right direction. And chief among these was Ruskin, who, it is true, promoted the cause of intellectual culture, but, on the other hand, considered that a picture was fulfilling a mission if it incited its beholders to piety—who could brand Canaletto and Rembrandt as bad painters, and went into raptures over the elegant sketches of a Prout.

It is not so easy to agree with Whistler upon another point—his conception of the artist as an entirely self-contained phenomenon. Possibly that thought of his—"No hovel is safe from Art, no Prince may depend upon it"—took his imagination

captive and led him into the error of isolating the artist.

“A favourite faith, dear to those who teach, is that certain periods were especially artistic, and that nations, readily named, were notably lovers of Art.

“So we are told that the Greeks were, as a people, worshippers of the beautiful, and that in the fifteenth century Art was engrained in the multitude.

“That the great masters lived in common understanding with their patrons—that the early Italians were artists—all—and that the demand for the lovely thing produced it.

“That we, of to-day, in gross contrast to this Arcadian purity, call for the ungainly, and obtain the ugly.”

. . . . .  
“Listen! There never was an artistic period.

“There never was an art-loving nation.”  
. . . . .

“Why this lifting of the brow in deprecation of the present—this pathos in reference to the past?

“If Art be rare to-day, it was seldom heretofore.

"It is false, this teaching of decay.

"The master stands in no relation to the moment at which he occurs—a monument of isolation—hinting at sadness—and having no part in the progress of his fellow men.

"He is also no more the product of civilisation than is the scientific truth asserted dependent upon the wisdom of a period. The assertion itself requires the *man* to make it. The truth was from the beginning.

"So Art is limited to the infinite, and beginning there cannot progress.

"A silent indication of its wayward independence from all extraneous advance is in the absolutely unchanged condition and form of implement since the beginning of things.

"The painter has but the same pencil—the sculptor the chisel of centuries.

"Colours are not more since the heavy hangings of night were first drawn aside, and the loveliness of light revealed.

"Neither chemist nor engineer can offer new elements of the masterpiece."

Therein lies the final conclusion of an idle dispute about words. Granted that all colours have been in existence since the beginning of all

things, still they had no value until the human eye was able to distinguish them, which only occurred after the lapse of centuries ; just as it will doubtless in the course of further centuries develop yet more refined sensibilities, of which we at present have no conception.

Attempts have been made to place Whistler in the wrong by emphasising the fact that every artist is a product partly of temperament, and partly of environment, and thus cannot be described as isolated ; also that artistically disposed races, nations, and periods are matters of history. This, however, is due to an imperfect comprehension of Whistler's meaning, for which his own defective and vague mode of expression is to blame. It is only a creative, not a passive, participation in Art that he denies to specified nations and periods.

That which constitutes the artist comes to him from the vast Unknown, the great Unfathomable, like everything else that we call Life. Once the artist is in being, he is in contact with both origin and environment, but he determines them, not they him. He, by virtue of his genius, moulds them to his life-work ; they exercise no dominating influence upon him, or upon his artistic gift. They are his clay that he moulds,

never his masters and counsellors. Therefore, as Whistler maintains, humanity has never, either as a nation or as the product of a period, exercised a guiding influence on art, but is itself influenced thereby—sometimes to a greater, sometimes to a lesser degree.

And now this proud hymn, which perhaps stands alone in its dignity of all odes ever inspired by self-glorification, swells into a lofty apostrophe to the coming Master :

“With the man, then, and not with the multitude, are her intimacies ; and in the book of her life the names inscribed are few—scant, indeed, the list of those who have helped to write her story of love and beauty.

“From the sunny morning, when, with her glorious Greek relenting, she yielded up the secret of repeated line, as, with his hand in hers, together they marked, in marble, the measured rhyme of lovely limb and draperies flowing in unison, to the day when she dipped the Spaniard’s brush in light and air, and made his people live within their frames, and stand upon their legs, that all nobility and sweetness, and tenderness, and magnificence should be theirs by right, ages had gone by, and few had been her choice.



“Countless indeed, the horde of pretenders ! But she knew them not.

“A teeming, seething, busy mass, whose virtue was industry, and whose industry was vice !

“Therefore have we cause to be merry !—and to cast away all care—resolved that all is well—as it ever was—and that it is not meet that we should be cried at, and urged to take measures !

“We have then but to wait—until, with the mark of the gods upon him, there comes among us again the chosen—who shall continue what has gone before. Satisfied that, even were he never to appear, the story of the beautiful is already complete—hewn in the marbles of the Parthenon—and brodered with the birds, upon the fan of Hokusai, at the foot of Fusiyama.”



HUCKSTER'S SHOP

(Lithograph)



## PRINCIPAL WORKS

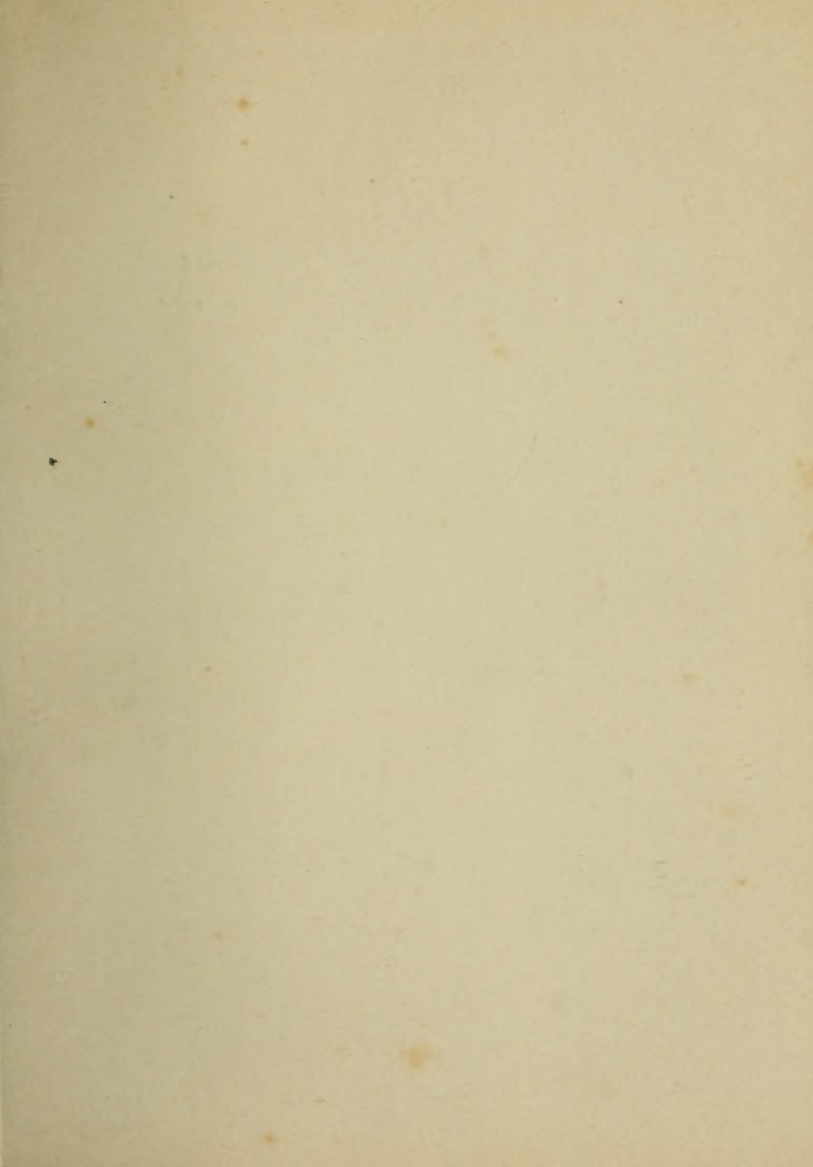
1. *Arrangement in Grey and Black*—The Artist's Mother. (*Luxembourg, Paris.*)
2. *Arrangement in Grey and Black*—Thomas Carlyle. (*Corporation Art Gallery, Glasgow.*)
3. The Master Smith of Lyme Regis. (*Museum, Boston.*)
4. Little Rose of Lyme Regis. (*Museum, Boston.*)
5. The White Girl. (*U.S.A.*)
6. La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine. (*Mr. C. L. Freer.*)
7. *Arrangement in Black and Brown*—The Fur Jacket. (*Mr. William Burrell.*)
8. Portrait of the Artist. (*Mr. George McCulloch.*)
9. *Arrangement in Black and Brown*—Miss Rosa Corder. (*Mr. R. Canfield.*)
10. *Arrangement in Grey and Green*—Miss Alexander. (*Mr. Alexander.*)
11. *Harmony in Pink and Grey*—Lady Meux.
12. *Arrangement in Black*—Lady Archibald Campbell. (*Wilstach Museum.*)

13. Pablo de Sarasate. (*Carnegie Institute, Pittsburg.*)
14. Théodore Duret. (*M. Théodore Duret.*)
15. Sir Henry Irving as Philip II. (*Sir H. Irving.*)
16. M. de Montesquiou.
17. Mrs. Huth.
18. Dr. W. McNeill Whistler. (*Mrs. Whistler.*)
19. Miss Connie Gilchrist.
20. La Mère Gérard. (*Mr. A. C. Swinburne.*)
21. *Symphony in White, No. II.*—The Little White Girl. (*Mr. A. H. Studd.*)
22. At the Piano. (*Mr. Edmund Davis.*)
23. *Symphony in White, No. III.* (*Mr. Edmund Davis.*)
24. *Arrangement in Black*—La Dame au Brodequin Jaune.
25. The Music Room. (*U.S.A.*)
26. *Brown and Gold*—The Curé's Little Class. (*Mr. J. J. Cowan.*)
27. *Caprice in Purple and Gold*—The Gold Screen. (*Lord Battersea.*)
28. The Lange Leizen—of the Six Marks—*Purple and Rose*
29. *Nocturne in Grey and Silver*—Chelsea Embankment, Winter.
30. Chelsea in Ice.
31. *Nocturne in Blue and Gold*—Old Battersea Bridge.
32. *Nocturne*—Trafalgar Square, Snow.
33. *Nocturne in Blue and Silver.* (*Mrs. F. R. Leyland.*)

34. *Nocturne in Opal and Silver*—The Music Room.
35. *Nocturne in Grey and Gold*—Chelsea, Snow.
36. *Nocturne in Blue and Silver*—Battersea Reach.
37. *Nocturne in Grey and Gold*—Westminster Bridge.
38. *Nocturne in Blue and Gold*—Southampton Water.
39. *Nocturne in Blue and Gold*—Valparaiso.
40. *Nocturne in Brown and Silver*—Old Battersea  
Bridge.
41. *Nocturne in Blue and Gold*—St. Mark's, Venice.
42. *Crepuscle in Flesh-colour and Green*—Valparaiso.
43. *Symphony in Grey and Green*—The Ocean.
44. *Pink and Grey*—Chelsea. (*Lord Battersea.*)
45. *Harmony in Flesh-colour and Green*—The Balcony.  
(*Mr. C. L. Freer.*)
46. *An Orange Note*—Sweet Shop.









PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE  
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

---

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

---

H&SS  
A  
3785

UTL AT DOWNSVIEW



D RANGE BAY SHLF POS ITEM C  
39 09 12 02 05 004 7